

by the ramblin rose

# Forty One Eggs

**\*\*I own nothing from the Walking Dead.\*\***

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"No," Daryl responded. "What's lame is your sorry attitude about the whole damn thing, Soph. You ain't never been on no Easter egg hunt and now you are. Go&#160;"find the eggs."

"How many are there?" She asked.

Daryl smiled, but he quickly wiped away the expression and furrowed his brow. After all, any hunt was a serious one, even if it was for candy filled plastic eggs.

"They was two packs," Daryl calculated. "Twenty eggs in each one. I hid every one of 'em."

Sophia's face crinkled.

"\_Forty\_ eggs?!" She responded. She looked like she was moments away from stomping her foot and Carol bit her lip. Sophia might very well \_stomp\_ her foot with Daryl. That, in itself, was one of the biggest changes that Carol had seen in her daughter since she'd started dating Daryl about a year ago and, even more so, in the three months or so since Daryl had moved into their home. Sophia was \_comfortable\_ with him. She was growing a little more comfortable each day with the fact that she could express herself, and her feelings, with the man.

She never would have dared to even \_complain\_ \_around\_ her father.

But with Daryl? Sophia made some demands, here or there, and she expressed what she did and didn't like. And, even if she didn't always get her wayâ€"which was very much how Carol preferred it to beâ€"Daryl always responded to her in a \_kind\_ manner. "No" meant "no," and "do it" meant "do it," but there was never a hand raised to back up either response.

"Forty eggs," Daryl confirmed. "There's candy in most of 'em, but there's money in a couple. And there's one egg what's got somethin' real special in it. So you best find all of 'em."

Sophia tilted her head slightly with interest.

"How much money?" She asked.

Daryl chuckled and shooed her again.

"Find the damn eggs, Soph," he declared. "We're gonna want to eat that lunch your mama packed before the ants do."

With a great deal of reluctance, Sophia turned and started in the direction of where Daryl had hidden the eggs. She bent, dramatically, and gathered up the first one she foundâ€"one that Carol could see from where she satâ€"and then she continued on. Carol smoothed the blanket around her and reached to move the basket with the aforementioned lunch a little farther away. Then she called Daryl's name to pull his attention away from watching Sophia for a moment and she patted the blanket.

"Come sit with me?" Carol requested. "If the time it takes her to find her shoes is any indicationâ€"we'll be here for a while."

Daryl chuckled and came over. He walked the long way around the blanket, reluctant to risk tracking dirt onto it, and settled down next to her. He leaned, immediately, and requested a kiss. Carol quickly fulfilled the kiss and then directed her eyes to check Sophia's progress.

It wasn't Easter. Easter had been last week. Daryl had grilled steaks

and they'd had something like a family dinner to celebrate. Nothing special. It had only been that night when he'd discovered, through talking about holidays passed with Carol, that Sophia had never been to an egg hunt in all of her eleven years. And so, Easter or not, Daryl had determined that that particular fact needed to change. He'd packed the eggs with candy and goodiesâ€”most of which Carol didn't even know aboutâ€”alone and he'd gotten up early to come to the park and hide them while Carol got the lunch ready to meet him there with Sophia.

Carol knew that Daryl saw something of himself in Sophia. He'd been raised with a father that had been very much like Ed. His father, in fact, had been a great deal worse but Daryl wasn't interested in dealing in comparisons. Suffering wasn't a competition. His father had denied Daryl and his brother, in a number of ways, a normal and healthy childhood. As a result, Daryl held very few fond memories of the old man and very few fond memories of his life before he left his parents' home.

And he didn't want that for Sophia.

Sophia couldn't understand it right now. Forcing her into egg hunts and going to talk to Santa Clause, into petting zoos and pony rides, all of it seemed a little ridiculous to her right now. She didn't understand what Daryl was doing. She didn't understand what he was trying to do. He couldn't take Ed out of her life. He couldn't erase the bad memories that she had of the man. And he couldn't buy back the time.

But he could give her memories of all the things that he thought should mark the passing of a good childhoodâ€”even if the memories were a little tardy.

One day, Carol was sure, Sophia would understand it all. And she'd be more grateful for those little things than she would ever be able to put into words. Carol knew it because that's was how she felt.

Just as with Sophia, Daryl couldn't "undo" the damage that Ed had done for Carol. He couldn't take it back any more than she could take back what his father had done to him. He couldn't erase the marks on her body any more than she could smooth the lines on his back with her fingertips and her kisses. Even more so, he couldn't clear the marks the man left on her mind.

But he could bring her candy just because he remembered she liked it. He could bring her a flower for no reason at all except that he said it reminded him of her. He could call her just to say he loved her and to ask if she still loved himâ€”since it had been hours since she'd last confirmed it.

And he could show her how much he loved her daughterâ€”a child which, biologically, would never be his ownâ€”which was the greatest of these acts in Carol's mind.

Sophia was finding the eggs with ease, mostly because Daryl hadn't chosen any really difficult hiding places. Daryl, for his part, was directing her with signals when she stopped and glanced in their direction. She was still, somewhat, lamenting her fate. She was at the age where she was terrified that someone might see her

thereâ€"someone who might never understand why it was that she was on her first egg hunt this weekendâ€"and she'd be embarrassed at school.

"Bring what you got over here," Daryl called. "Let's count 'emâ€"see what'cha got left!"

Sophia came over, dragging her feet slightly as she came, and dumped the basket onto the blanket. The multicolored eggs spilled out and at least one of them popped open and deposited its chocolate kiss treasure into the pile. Daryl leaned up, sorted through the eggs, and counted them under his breath.

"You're missin' ten," Daryl said. "Noâ€"eleven."

"There are thirty eggs there," Carol offered. "She's missing ten."

"Eleven," Daryl corrected. "They was forty regular plastic eggs, but they was one more too. Was bigger. Striped. Come by itself. I bought it out of the packages."

"So there's forty one eggs," Carol said.

Daryl hummed.

"Eleven eggs, Sophia," Carol said, laughing to herself. "Goâ€"sniff them out."

Sophia groaned and Carol raised her eyebrows at the girl in warning. She might not want to do the egg hunt, but it was a nice gesture. Besides, she'd be more than pleased once she was cracking open the bounty and gathering up the treats for herself.

"Might wannaâ€"look around that tree over there," Daryl said, gesturing. "You ain't gone near itâ€"but I'd think a tree was a pretty good hiding place if I was lookin' for eggs."

Sophia trotted off toward the tree with more enthusiasm than she'd shown before. Either she was secretly enjoying what she was pretending to consider torture, or she was excited by the prospect of finishing her hunt. Either way, there was a little more pep to her step as she pushed the border grass around the tree out of the way and gathered up a few more eggs.

"Around the tree, Soph!" Daryl called. "In the tree too, ya knowâ€"if I was lookin'!"

Carol laughed to herself. The expression on Daryl's face said that he was enjoying the egg hunt far more than Sophia. It almost made Carol want to gather the plastic eggs back up and go hide them herself for Daryl to find.

Of course, there was always later. And even though an egg hunt around their bedroom might not be nearly as exciting as having all this open space to search, Carol was sure the prizes could be better.

Carol reached her hand across the blanket and took Daryl's. At first he barely seemed to noticeâ€"too focused on Sophia for a momentâ€"but then he looked at her hand in his and he looked at her. She got a

quick smile from him and he squeezed her hand before he looked back at the girl.

"What'd you put in the eggs?" Carol asked.

"Candy," Daryl said. "Twenty bucksâ€"five bucks an eggâ€"in some of 'em."

"And the extra one?" Carol asked.

Daryl shook his head and squeezed her hand in response.

"You as bad as she is," he said. "Don't wanna wait for nothin'."

Carol laughed to herself, but she decided to wait. She'd let him have his fun.

When Sophia had found all the eggs, she walked over to the blanket and dropped the basket, eggs and all, into the pile of eggs that she'd already found.

"Eleven," she declared. "They're all there. And I don't appreciate you making me stick my hand in that hole for that one. You don't know, Daryl, but there could've been snakes in there."

"Was a bird's nest in there," Daryl said. "All I needed to know to tell me that apparently the area ain't real bad for snakes. Open your eggs. Then we can eat. I can smell that chicken and my stomach's sayin' you took too long."

Sophia sat down on the blanket, some short distance from them, and started cracking open eggs. Carol finally directed her to empty the basket and start putting her candy in there, so that it wouldn't simply be spilled out all over the blanket, and she watched as Sophia went egg by egg and deposited her prizes into the basket. Carol finally leaned up, grabbed the bag that she'd brought with her, and began collecting the discarded shells. Daryl leaned up, too, and snagged the largest of the eggs. He yanked it over to his side and hid it behind his back.

"Do I have to find that one again?" Sophia asked. "Because I know where it is. It's behind your back."

Daryl shook his head.

"Just open the eggs," he said.

Sophia was obviously more pleased with the eggs carrying five dollar bills than she was with anything else. Visions of what she'd buy with the money were, no doubt, already dancing around in her head. Carol knew that Sophia was saving up for some thing or another and the money would go nicely in her reserve. When she'd finally finished, and Carol had collected up the last of the plastic shells, Sophia held her hands up to Daryl to show him that there was nothing else to be done.

He hummed at her.

"You like egg hunting?" He asked.

Sophia glanced at Carol and back at Daryl. He got the first genuine smile out of her that he'd gotten all day, even if it was just a little one.

"It was alright, I guess," she said with a shrug.

He pulled the egg from behind his back and offered it to her.

"Open this one now," he said.

Carol had to admit that her curiosity was piqued too. Daryl was watching the egg almost like he expected something marvelous to come out of it. Carol couldn't imagine what it was, but it was obviously the most exciting part of the whole fiasco. Sophia took the egg and shook it close to her ear and Daryl jumped slightly forward.

"Open the thing, Soph! Don't shake it to death!" He barked.

Sophia's eyes went a little wide at his words, but then they returned quickly to their normal size and she did just what he told her to do. She cracked open the egg and, for a moment, Carol couldn't see what she was looking at with a furrowed brow.

That was, until she dumped the contents into her hand and held everything up.

Pinched between Sophia's fingers was a ribbon. On either end of the length of ribbon, there was a ring dangling. And from either ring there was a small tag of sorts.

"Ain't all for you," Daryl said. "Butâ€”I figured you was gonna be the person that really made the decision either way."

Sophia rested it in her hands again and read each tag. Without saying anything, she leaned up and offered everything to Carol. Carol's heart was pounding in her chest. She took it from Sophia, the whole collection dumped into her palm, and she read the tagsâ€”first one and then the other.

"\_Be my kid?" \_The tag attached to the smallest of the rings readâ€”a small diamond chip set in a plain white gold band.

"\_Marry me? Make us a family?" \_The other read, attached to the most beautiful diamond solitaire that Carol had ever seen.

Carol swallowed. She could feel Daryl looking at her even if she wasn't looking at him. Just as he expected she wouldâ€”and surely what he meant when he said that Sophia would be the one to make the decisionâ€”Carol glanced at Sophia. And when she did, Sophia smiled at her and nodded her head just the slightest bit. Carol responded with the same gesture and then she looked at Darylâ€”he was staring at her with expectation all over his face, his expression tinged only a little by the nerves that he couldn't entirely hide.

"What'cha say?" He asked finally. Carol smiled at him and leaned forward to kiss him. He returned the kiss, but quickly pushed her back. "That a yes?" He asked, barely hiding his smile.

She nodded at him.

"Yes," she said. "Let's have some lunch? I'll fix the plates and...maybe you could...work the knots out of these?"

She offered him the ribbon and he blushed slightly.

"Didn't think of that," he said, staring at the tiny but very well tied knots around the rings. Carol laughed to herself.

"You don't have to think of everything," Carol said. "Butâ€"you come pretty close."

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file.